

slaves from the Angolan ports.³ Her theory implies an ethnic identification retained by BaKongo peoples. 101

Another theory also suggests that the name was group-initiated, yet from a different ethnic source. "Golla" was used in the eighteenth century while "Gullah" was a nineteenth-century term for slaves in the coastal region of South Carolina. A very large group of Africans from the Liberian hinterland were called Golas, sometimes spelled "Goulah." Chapter 1 discusses their importation into the Carolina Lowcountry and Georgia in large numbers during a period of rapid growth and settlement. One early twentieth-century white South Carolinian, Reed Smith, wrote extensively about Gullah dialect, maintaining that the term refers to the Golas of Liberia. His suggestion alone proves nothing. But further research demonstrates its plausibility, or at least the possibility of two complimentary original derivations. During the colonial era, Africans from the Windward Coast (Sierra Leone and Liberia) entered Charleston and heavily contributed to the coastal and Sea Island population. Golas and neighboring Gizzis (also called Kizzis or Giggis) were two of the largest African ethnic groups preyed upon by domineering Mende, Vai, Mandingas, and others. Methodist missionaries went to Liberia in the 1840s to convert the "Goulah nation." The spelling of Gullah and Goulah have obvious similarities. Additionally, missionaries were struck by "Goulah" Africans' use of English, as Northerners were by the Gullah speech. "The native Africans never use the personal pronoun of the third person feminine," wrote one missionary in 1843. ". . . it is always 'he, him.'" Similarly, Elizabeth Botume wrote of her initial incomprehension of the Gullah dialect during the Civil War, stating that her head grew "dizzy" trying to understand it. Worst of all for Botume was the confusion regarding family relations: "I never knew whether they were talking of boys or girls. They spoke of all as 'him.'" 114
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Even more interesting observations come from Lorenzo Turner's *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*.⁵ There are a number of problems with Turner's study. Yet even critics admit that in a "fair number of instances the derivation and meaning found for a Gullah name are reasonably convincing."⁶ Turner includes in his list of African words *gula* (*gola*, *gula*) which he takes to mean "Gullah, a dialect spoken by Negroes in coastal South Carolina and Georgia, one who speaks Gullah." He does not list an African homologue for *gula*, but defines its African equivalent as "*gola* (. . . *gula*, *gura*) a Liberian tribe and its language . . . also see *ngola*, a 174
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NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

114
• 174 tribe in the Hamba basin of Angola.⁷⁷ Hence Turner allows for both possibilities in the origin of the term. Linguist P. E. Hair observes that, given this Gola association, it is curious that Turner found almost no Gola language terms. Hair has another insight. It is generally conceded that Turner may have exaggerated the amount of African influence in Gullah, but also that he "conclusively" demonstrated it had "more" 'Africanisms' than any other dialect in the United States. But, says Hair, it has gone unnoticed that "a remarkably large proportion of the 'Africanisms' cited by Turner came from the Sierra Leone region." Of the 3,500 words listed by Turner and used in Gullah, only 500 are "working vocabulary" terms with known meaning. Of the latter number, 350 are terms used in conversation. The Sierra Leone proportion is about 20 percent. Also, the shortest list is terms from Gullah stories, songs, and prayers. There are 85 such terms and 63 percent are Mende and 21 are Vai. Says Hair, "thus the Sierra Leone region makes virtually a clean sweep of this list."⁸

Of the 3,000 personal names with "suggested" derivations, Hair states that even here the Sierra Leone influence is prominent. He suggests that Turner missed other ethnic identifications of Windward Coast origin (Bullom, Limba, Kissi, and Gola for instance), because "no dictionary or informant was available."⁹ This indicates a greater Upper Guinea influence than scholars have previously recognized. Most have concentrated on the Kongo-Angolan influence, as indeed from first appearances, does Lorenzo Turner.¹⁰

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(567) African-American slaves who inhabited the Georgia coast were called Geechees, but had essentially the same culture as Gullahs. Linguistically speaking, Turner uses both terms interchangeably. He lists *gisi* as Mende and defines it as "a language and tribe of the Kissy country (Liberia)." Both Golas and Gizzis shared the same cultural institutions—Poro and Sande—as indeed did the Mende, Vai, Bullom, and others over a wide geographical area. Today *Geechee* is a folk term, generally used as a provocation. In this context it means "country." The term is generally used between intimates in a joking manner, or intended as a challenge to fight.¹¹

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551 One final point on linguistic considerations regarding Gullah origins. Several Gullah personal names identified by Turner and listed with West African equivalents relate to Windward Coast secret societies. For example, Gullah *beri*, and *berimo* are listed as Vai. The former Gullah name refers to "... a branch of the society known as pora ... a 'ceremonial

NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

PROLOGUE

19

rite." For the latter Gullah name, Turner states "... a ceremony during which the male receives the national mark . . . and a new name, at the same time being given certain instructions which he keeps strictly secret. . . ." The Gullah name *pora* Turner determines is Mende, referring to "the great secret society of the men." Also, Turner's African equivalent for the Gullah name *zo* is a Vai term, "the wearer of the mask in the Sande Society." Among Windward Coast groups, secret society leaders hid behind masks and the leaders were called *zo*.¹² Given the fact that the above Gullah words are personal names rather than vocabulary terms, one obviously views these relationships as speculative. Yet they do point to Upper Guinea influence. These considerations, together with observations made by P. E. Hair, indicate a strong ethnic influence in South Carolina of peoples from the Windward Coast.

This suggested presence of Upper Guinea and Windward Coast influences qualifies rather than negates the BaKongo impact. Certainly early colonial records indicate the overwhelming presence of Kongo-Angolan groups. As far as linguistics go, Turner argues strongly for that impact. Furthermore, some linguistic relationships noted for Windward Coast groups can be made for BaKongo. For example, the Gullah *ndoko* is Bobangi (KiKongo), referring to "a bewitching that is said to cause illness." In KiKongo *ndoki* is a sorcerer, or witch. Also, the Gullah name *n'zambi* is KiKongo for God. Yet how does one account for what Hair calls "the extraordinary" prevalence of Sierra Leone terms in Gullah ritual and working vocabulary? Undoubtedly both ethnic influences were significant. Moreover, the prevalence of Tshi names among Gullahs probably indicates important Ashanti and Fanti presence, the first slaves to reach Carolina as well.¹³

Brazilian scholar, Roger Bastide, points out that even in Portuguese communities where Bantu peoples dominated the slave population, "only a few traces of their religion survived. . . ." Perhaps Bastide makes too fine a distinction between religion and magic. Taking a theme from Melville Herskovits, he acknowledges the continued significance of customs related to death, funeral practices, and afterlife, but also maintains that Bantu was the most susceptible of all African religions to "external influences." More recently, Robert Farris Thompson takes a more expansive approach. In discussing the religion and art that "withstood the horrors of the middle passage," Thompson argues for a strong BaKongo influence. He believes the BaKongo cosmogram was "too complex" to re-

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NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

- 174 main, but other elements of religion and ritual were not. Sacred medicine in the form of conjuration and healing is one example. According to Thompson "Nowhere is Kongo-Angola influence on the New World more pronounced, more profound than in black traditional cemeteries in the South. The nature of the objects that decorate the graves there . . . reveals a strong continuity . . . a restatement of the Kongo notion of the tomb as a charm for the persistence of the spirit. . . ." Thompson notes the strong sense of communion with ancestors among Kongo peoples and manifestations of this retentive element in the New World. Additionally, the BaKongo concepts of "bad magic" play a significant role in New World attitudes toward the supernatural.¹⁴ All of these elements were part of Kongo sacred traditions. Thus, a complex pattern of convergence of at least two African cultural regions developed in coastal Carolina, creating a socioreligious community among the Gullahs.

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567 Sea Island Gullahs received little attention in antebellum days. On the contrary, while as laborers they produced some of the world's finest cotton, Sea Island slavery was a very impersonal type of bondage. Most slaveholders did not directly oversee their plantations, nor live on the "unhealthy" islands for more than a season. But the advent of civil conflict brought some immediate changes. Early in the war the Sea Island region was occupied by Northern forces, and widespread interest centered on these slaves whom the "aristocracy" left behind in their hasty flight. It was in the Sea Islands that the so-called "Port Royal experiment," supposedly a test of black initiative and valor, was tried.¹⁵

(1797) Northern reaction to the Gullahs was mixed. Not all of the "missionaries" who embarked on the Sea Island enterprise were convinced that efforts at "uplifting" Gullahs would succeed. "It is the opinion of all who know the South," wrote Arthur Sumner of Cambridge, Mass., from St. Helena Island, "that the negroes of these Sea Islands are the most degraded slaves South of Dixie's Line . . . a meaner, more ungrateful and unhandsome lot than those of our district I pray that I shall never see."¹⁶

Undoubtedly Northerners such as Sumner were completely unprepared to find such "foreign" and "pure" blacks, who had an initial suspicion about the motives of white people no matter what their political affiliation. Yet other Northerners felt differently about the Gullahs and grew to truly appreciate them. Their distinct form of speech was more than a separate dialect which linguists and folklorists later attempted to

NN23 Sea Islanders NN23 South Carolina

PROLOGUE

357

- 121 27. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness, Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rod-
569 ney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1973), 46-59.
- 113 28. Ibid.; Arthur P. Mendel, ed., *Essential Works of Marxism* (New York: Bantam Books, 1961), 15-16.
29. John Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972 ed.), 200-201.
30. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 329-88, 441.
31. Ibid., xvii.
- 113 32. John M. Janzen and Wyatt MacGaffey, *An Anthology of Kongo Religion: Primary Texts from Lower Zaire* (Lawrence, Kans.: University of Kansas Publications in Anthropology, No. 5, 1974), 2-3.

Prologue

1. Mason Crum, *Gullah, Negro Life in the Carolina Sea Islands* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1940), 3, 19-22, 78; Guion G. Johnson, *A Social History of the Sea Islands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1930), 112, 130; Paul Quattlebaum, *The Land Called Chicora* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1958), 86-88.
- 175 2. The spelling of Kongo with a K instead of C is used by some Africanists. It refers to
567 the traditional, unitary civilization and way of life of BaKongo peoples. The C spelling represents the political shift that occurred with white colonial penetration and partition in Central Africa. Traditional Kongo civilization includes modern Bas-Zaïre, neighboring Cabinda, Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, and Northern Angola. The ancient civilization was once under the united suzerainty of the kingdom of Kongo. The language is KiKongo, although dialects vary widely in this Bantu-speaking world of Africa. The numerous ethnic groups and some neighboring ones share cultural and religious traditions. They also share memories of the trials and tears left in the wake of centuries of transatlantic trade in slaves. John M. Janzen and Wyatt MacGaffey, *An Anthology of Kongo Religion: Primary Texts from Lower Zaire* (Lawrence, Kans.: University of Kansas Publications in Anthropology, No. 5, 1974), 1-3; Robert Farris Thompson and Joseph Cornet, *The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds* (Washington, D. C.: National Gallery of Art, 1981), 27; Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 103; Wyatt MacGaffey, *Custom and Government in the Lower Congo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 11; Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 30-36, 44-45, 134-35, 411.
- 101 3. SCG, March 27, 1742; Reed Smith, "Gullah," *A Reprint of Bulletin #190 of the Uni-*
113 *versity of South Carolina* (Columbia: State Printing Co., 1926), 3-4; Winifred Vass, *The Bantu Speaking Heritage of the United States* (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, 1979), 31.
- 199 4. Smith, "Gullah," 3-4; SCA, December 22 and 29, 1843; Elizabeth Hyde Borrome, *First Days Amongst the Contrabands* (New York: Arno Press and New York Times, 1968; repr. from 1893 ed.), 54, 57. Peter Wood also suggests that perhaps Gullah derived from a "multiple etymology." See *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Slave Rebellion* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1974), 172, n. 12.
- 113 5. Lorenzo D. Turner, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (New York: Arno Press and New York Times, 1969; repr. from 1949 ed.).
- 174 6. See reviews and discussions by Raven I. McDavid, Jr., *Language: Journal of the Lin-*
114 *guistic Society of America* 26 (April-June, 1950): 323-32, and Morris Swadesh, *Word: Journal*
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NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

358

PROLOGUE

- 124
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[101] of the *Linguistic Circle of New York* 7 (April, 1951): 82-83; P. E. Hair, "Sierra Leone Items in the Gullah Dialect of American English," *Sierra Leone Language Review* no. 4 (1965): 79-84; Frederick G. Cassidy, "The Place of Gullah," *American Speech* 55 no. 1 (Spring, 1980): 3-14.
7. Turner, *Africanisms in Gullah*, 194. Gullahs often referred to themselves as "countrymen," as a way of identifying themselves as African-born. When asked what their language was, they would reply, "the way we talk." Mary A. Twining and Keith E. Baird, "Introduction to Sea Island Folklife," *Journal of Black Studies* 10, no. 4 (June, 1980): 398; Donald R. Kloe, "Buddy Quow: An Anonymous Poem in Gullah-Jamaican Dialect Written Circa 1800," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (June, 1974): 82-84.
8. Hair, "Sierra Leone Items in Gullah," 79-81.
9. *Ibid.*, 83.
- (561) 10. Turner, *Africanisms in Gullah*, passim; Curtin, *Atlantic Slave Trade*; Wood, *Black Majority*. Wood does suggest, however, that the Windward Coast slaves had a special appeal and significance because South Carolinians recognized their familiarity with rice, the colony's main export. The Windward Coast was also called the Grain Coast and in specific areas the Rice Coast. As Wood observes, "Throughout the era of slave importation in South Carolina references can be found concerning African familiarity with rice." Wood, *Black Majority*, 59-60. Daniel Littlefield further explored Wood's idea and provides an exception to the general emphasis on Kongo-Angolan influences. See his *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981). Another important author, the late Walter Rodney, also early recorded the significance of Upper Guinea in the transatlantic trade, although Rodney was not specifically writing about South Carolina. See his *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).
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114 11. Turner, *Africanisms in Gullah*, 91, 194; Twining and Baird, "Introduction to Sea Island Folklife," 397-98.
12. Turner, *Africanisms in Gullah*, 63, 151, 189; see Chapters 2 and 9.
13. *Ibid.*, 136, 138, 108; Wood, *Black Majority*, 131, 302, 334-39; Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, Chapter 2, 107, 108; Hair, "Sierra Leone Items in Gullah," 83; Kloe, "Buddy Quow," 87; Cassidy, "Place of Gullah," 7-14. Linguist Ian Hancock believes that Kikongo speech "cannot be counted as a contributing factor to Gullah," despite the large numerical representation, because BaKongo peoples did not go through a creolization process. He argues, even more forcefully than Hair, for Upper Guinea Coast influences since some of these Africans already spoke a creole because of contact with whites on the Guinea Coast. While assessment of Upper Guinea linguistic impact appears sound, Turner, Cassidy and others continue to support significant Kongo and Gold Coast influences. Ian F. Hancock, "Gullah and Barbadian—Origins and Relationships," *American Speech* 55 no. 1 (Spring, 1980): 27-32.
- (113) 14. Roger Bastide, *African Civilizations in the New World*, trans. Peter Green (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 106, 154, 161; Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958 repr. from 1941 ed.); Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, Chapter 2; Thompson and Cornet, *Four Moments of the Sun*, 151-57, 178-203.
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113 15. Willie Lee Rose, *Rebursal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964).
16. Arthur Sumner to Lt. Joseph Clark, January 23, 1863, Penn School Papers, vol. 4, SHC.
17. Diary of William F. Allen, 25, 44, 83-84, in William F. Allen Family Papers, 1775-

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[177] become characteristic of Sea Islanders were a result of early exposure to "cultured" White plantation owners. The conflicting feature of these two notions is evident.

Turner's research cleared up much of the confusion relative to the origin of Gullah.¹¹ His report that the dialect is highly reflective of linguistic systems common to West Africa provides a geographical origin of Gullah Blacks.

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174 That the Gullah dialect has features which are identifiable as distinctly West African linguistic habits is consistent with the research which places West Africa as the origin of the Gullah Blacks. Donnan¹² offers the following list as illustrative of the African origin of Sea Islanders:

Gambia to Sierra Leone
Liberia and the Ivory Coast
(Rice and Grain Coasts)
Guinea Coast (Gold Coast to Calabar)
Angola and the Congo

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178 Herskovits, Crum and others propose that the relatively recent arrival of West Africans to the Sea Islands and the isolation of these islands has been conducive to the retention of African cultural elements. Herskovits suggests that the last population of Africans coming directly to the Charleston Sea port was about 1850. Researchers are in agreement that nowhere in the United States

¹¹ Lorenzo Turner, Africanism in the Gullah Dialect (Chicago, 1949).

¹² E. Donnan, The Slave Trade into South Carolina before the Revolution, Am. Hist. Rev. 33: 804-828, 1927-28.

6: Smith

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(no date) 1989

NN23 Sea Islanders NN23

South Carolina

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are more distinctly West African patterns encountered as are found among Sea Island communities. It has also been suggested in the dialect research and folklore collections, that as distance from the mainland increases, more distinctly West African cultural traits are encountered. Similarly, older Sea Islanders tend to mirror West African cultural patterns to larger extents and in purer forms than younger islanders. These reports support the notion that the factors of isolation and of recent arrival have operated to enhance the protection and subsequent retention of Africanism among Gullah Blacks to an extent unique in the United States.

THE PROBLEM

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The significance of Sea Islanders as a people who because of their unique situation have retained overt manifestations of their West African heritage is clearly noted in the literature. While he argues against the retention position in general, Frazier could not deny the exception of Sea Islanders. He writes:

During the process of adjusting themselves to American civilization, the majority of the Negroes have sloughed off completely the African heritage.¹³

In view of Turner's work (1939) among Sea Islanders, Frazier modifies his position, "African patterns of thought and

¹³ Frazier, op. cit., pp. 3-21.

8: Smith Q-4,5 (no date) 1926

NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

GULLAH

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

101 Even to those familiar with the American Negro through the medium of either life or literature, the term Gullah is a little-known word for a less-known people. It is applied to a special group-type of Negroes, limited historically and geographically to the sea-islands and the narrow tidewater strip bordering the coast counties of South Carolina and Georgia and a small section of north-east Florida. The language spoken by these Negroes constitutes a patois unique among the dialects of the United States, and differs from the more familiar upland Negro dialects as written by Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page, as markedly as those dialects differ from the French Creole of Louisiana and the Mississippi Delta.

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101 Both the word Gullah and the Negroes so named came from the West Coast of Africa, but exactly where has not been agreed upon. There are two widely-held conjectures. One is that Gullah is a shortened form of Angola, the name of an African West Coast district lying south of the Equator and the mouth of the Congo River. A small but positive bit of evidence to this effect is found in an entry of the Charleston City Council, under the year 1822, in which reference is made to "Gullah Jack" and his company of "Gullah or Angola Negroes." This indicates that, rightly

¹This was the opinion of Mr. Ambrose E. Gonzales, a high authority on Gullah and author of the Black Border Series of Gullah stories. This was also the view of the Rev. John G. Williams. In the Preface to his *De Old Plantation*, Allendale, 1898, he wrote: "Gullah is very probably a corruption of Angola, shortened to Gola, a country of West Africa, and a part of Lower Guinea, from which a great many negroes were brought to this country in the days of the slave trade. I remember hearing the old plantation negroes before the war speak of one as a 'Gullah nigger' and another as a 'Guinea nigger'. In Appleton's *New American Cyclopaedia* the Guinea negroes are described as 'black and having thick lips and flat noses', and the Angola, or 'Gulla' negroes as having 'few of the negro peculiarities of form and feature. They are brown in color'. These differences between negroes in the country have been often noticed and remarked upon frequently, the explanation of which differences is that the 'thick lips' and 'flat noses' point to Ashantee and Dahomey as the places from which their ancestors were brought and the 'brown color' and features more like the European in some negroes, very different from the Guineans, point to Angola or 'Gulla' as the country from which their ancestors came. So deeply fixed are the race and even tribal characteristics. There is history in the word 'Gullah', as it is improperly spelt."

8: Smith Q-4,5 (no date) 1926

NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

8

UNIVERSITY EXTENSION DIVISION

• 174
[10] or wrongly, as far back as 1822 the official governing body of the City of Charleston regarded Gullah as a corrupted form of Angola.

A second, more probable suggestion is that Gullah comes from the name of the Liberian group of tribes known as Golas living on the West Coast between Sierra Leone and the Ivory Coast. These Golas were formerly numerous and powerful, but have now dwindled to a small remnant tribe dwelling some thirty miles inland from Monrovia, the chief sea-port of Liberia. "The dialect of the West Coast, from which came these Gullah negroes," says a leading authority on the subject, "was early commented upon as peculiarly harsh, quacking, flat in intonation, quick, clipped, and peculiar even in Africa. Bosman, the Dutch sailor, described its peculiar tonality, and calls its speakers the 'quaquas, because they gabbled like geese'."

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[197] Whether originally from Angola or from Liberia, these Gullah tribesmen after their enforced immigration to our shores formed a distinct and peculiar group. Their resolute and persistent nature evidently assisted in impressing their dialectal characteristics on weaker and more plastic Negroes from elsewhere brought in contact with them, and definitely fixed for two hundred years the tonality of the Negro dialect of the Carolina and Georgia coast.

[127] "Mr. John Bennett of Charleston, author of *Master Skylark*, *Madame Margot*, etc., who has been studying the Gullah language and history for a score of years. His article "Gullah; A Negro Patola" (*The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Part I, Oct., 1906; Part II, Jan., 1909) is a most scholarly and penetrating treatment. The present paper draws deeply from it, as also from the work of Mr. Gonzales. Mr. Bennett feels strongly that the Angola derivation for Gullah is quite without foundation; and reiterates his belief in a personal letter to the writer: "God alone knows all the sources of Gullah, (as a language) its vocabularies, its accents, etc.; but its name came from that odd, primitive people, back of Monrovia, whose name has been spelled various ways, but which, as we have it, is Gullah."

A third derivation, almost certainly wrong, may be mentioned in passing. Rev. Robert Hamill Nassau, M.D., who was for forty years a missionary in the French Congo, thought the Gullahs might come ultimately from a powerful tribe of Camero or Comi Negroes called Gwalla.

"Many of these Negroes were brought to the West Indies and the Carolinas at an early date. The earliest were tempered by servitude in the islands of Bermuda, the Bahamas, Jamaica, San Domingo, etc., before arrival in Carolina. Later the untampered Africans were brought direct from the West Coast to Charleston.

An instance of the marked individuality and persistence of Gullah, even under adverse conditions, is told by John O. Williams in *De Ole Plantation*, (Preface V.): "More, perhaps, than a hundred years ago certain negroes were carried from a rice plantation in Colleton County and put on a cotton plantation in Barnwell District,

8: Smith Q-4,5 (no date) 1926

NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

GULLAH

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Of equal importance, if that be possible, with the native quality of the Gullah vernacular, was the environment under which they lived in this country. They seem to have been imported almost exclusively to the sea-islands and coast of two states, South Carolina and Georgia. This section, from Colonial days to the Civil War, was the richest and most cultured of that part of the South. Rice, the chief low-country crop of that day, was extremely lucrative under slave-labor, as was the silky, long-staple sea-island cotton. Large plantations of thousands of acres were the rule, on which the wealthy planters lived in characteristic, often feudal prosperity.

Even today, two generations after the disintegration of the social forces that brought them into existence, there remain impressive traces of these fine old estates, some abandoned and fallen into ruins, a few still kept up, some turned into hunting preserves, some still being farmed on a smaller scale. They stretch in an irregular chain along the coast, inlets, and tidal rivers, each with the gray-weathered dwelling-house in its moss-draped grove of live-oaks; the big barns and slave-quarters off to one side, consisting of a double row of one-story cabins, now in ruins, lining the "street"; square mile after square mile of woodland, marshland, and level fields, once planted to rice, but

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as it was called then, but to this day (1898) the older ones of that set of negroes, who grew up before the war, speak as pure Gullah as their grandfathers and grandmothers spoke on Ashepoo. They seem to have been scarcely affected in their low-country Gullah speech by the white people that were numerous and all around them and the negroes native to that neighborhood, who talked so differently to themselves.

"If this seems to savor of the high-flown idyllic plantation tradition, fostered by professional Southerners, romantic literature, melodrama, and minstrel balladry, be it recalled that the ideal picture came closest to being realized in tide-water Virginia and in the rice districts of South Carolina. In regard to these localities it would be hard to overstate the facts. "Charles Dudley Warner, for example, dazzled by the scene of life in the Carolina rice districts exclaimed, 'Nowhere in this lovely age . . . so much splendor.'" F. P. Gaines, *The Southern Plantation*, Columbia University Press, 1924, p. 64. "Phillips says of the rice section: 'The towns were in sentiment and interest virtually a part of the plantation community and many prospering townsmen looked toward plantation retirement, carrying, as it did, in some degree, the badge of gentility, as the crown of their careers.'" *Ibid.*, 146, 148.

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Crevecoeur (*Letters from an American Farmer*, London, 1782.) called the life around Charleston 'the gayest in America': "Olmstead himself (*Seaboard Slave States, A Journey Through the Seaboard Slave States*, New York, 1864) refers to the rice planters as 'having less vulgar display and more intrinsic elegance than in any distinct class among us.'" *Ibid.*, p. 154.

10: Johnson S-4,5 (no date) 1930
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

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FOLK CULTURE ON ST. HELENA ISLAND

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for that group to play an important role. Such evidence as we have, although it is rather meager, seems to indicate that the tribal composition of the slaves was a hodge-podge of a score or more of West and Central African peoples. In the records of the Charleston slave merchants and in the files of *The South Carolina Gazette* will be found statements which prove the diversity of African stocks among the slaves. A recent research reveals that the following African tribes or regions were specifically mentioned in the Charleston slave market:² Gambia River, Whidah, Fanter, Coromantine, Bassa, Banca Island, Angola, Bight, Calabar, Messe-Congo, and Ebo.

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In an excellent study of the Gullah dialect, Professor Reed Smith, of the University of South Carolina, comments as follows on the probable origin of the term Gullah:³

Both the word Gullah and the Negroes so named came from the West Coast of Africa, but exactly where has not been agreed upon. There are two widely-held conjectures. One is that Gullah is a shortened form of Angola, the name of an African West Coast district lying south of the Equator and the mouth of the Congo River. A small but positive bit of evidence to this effect is found in an entry of the Charleston City Council, under the year

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² Elizabeth Donnan, "The Slave Trade in South Carolina Before the Revolution," *American Historical Review*, July, 1928. Miss Donnan makes this pertinent comment in a footnote: "It is a puzzling fact that the marked differences between the negro tribes, regarded as so important on their arrival, seem to have been speedily lost sight of. Advertisements of seasoned negroes, in so far as the writer has examined them, seldom emphasize the tribe or African locality from which the negro came; notices of runaway negroes occasionally mention place of origin but frequently do not. The evidence seems also to indicate that country-born negroes had lost all distinguishing characteristics or that the planter had grown oblivious to them with his longer association with the negroes."

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³ Gullah, pp. 7-8. The Charleston City Council entry mentioned is probably that found in *An Account of the Late Intended Insurrection*, etc., published by A. E. Miller, Charleston, 1822.

10: Johnson S-4,5 (no date) 1930
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

GULLAH: THE DIALECT OF THE NEGROES

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1822, in which reference is made to "Gullah Jack" and his company of "Gullah or Angola Negroes." This indicates that, rightly or wrongly, as far back as 1822 the official governing body of the City of Charleston regarded Gullah as a corrupted form of Angola. 101 194

A second, more probable suggestion is that Gullah comes from the name of the Liberian group of tribes known as the Golas living on the West Coast between Sierra Leone and the Ivory Coast. These Golas were formerly numerous and powerful, but have now dwindled to a small remnant tribe dwelling some thirty miles inland from Monrovia, the chief sea-port of Liberia.

Mr. John Bennett, who made the first serious study of the history and characteristics of Gullah, held this view. 197 101
He says:

The dialect of the West Coast, from which came these Gullah negroes was early commented upon as peculiarly harsh, quacking, flat in intonation, quick, clipped, and peculiar even in Africa. Bosman, the Dutch sailor, described its peculiar tonality, and calls its speakers the "quaquas, because they gabbled like geese."

Which of these theories is the more plausible is difficult to say. The derivation of the word Gullah is one thing and its usage another. Regardless of its true derivation, it came to be applied, not exclusively to one type of Negro, but to the Negroes of the sea-island and coastal region in general. Any ethnological significance that the word may have had at first was soon lost, and it seems likely that the entry of the Charleston City Council of 1822 represented the prevailing idea as to the derivation of the word. If the Golas were really important, would not the difference between them and the Angolas have become common knowledge after more than a hundred years 101

*"Gullah: A Negro Patois." *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Oct., 1908. There is room for difference of opinion as to whether the Gullah speech is harsh or quacking. It did not strike me that way at all. (113)

10: Johnson S-4,5 (no date) 1930
 NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
 South Carolina
 St. Helena Island

54 FOLK CULTURE ON ST. HELENA ISLAND

194
 [191]

would be looked upon by the plantation owners as interesting embellishments.

The following graph is offered as an illustration of the differences in pitch range and speed between Gullah and ordinary Southern white English speech. It is merely suggestive. The pitch differences are only relative, since it would require the use of phonophotography to discover the absolute ranges. The left-hand graph represents white speech, the right-hand, Negro speech.



1 SEC.

I don't know, mam.



0.6 SEC.

I ent know, mum.

African Words

• 174
 192

Tracing the etymologies of words supposed to be of African origin is anything but an easy task. Perhaps this is why some of the English dictionaries refrain from giving specific etymologies, merely saying that a certain word is "African," or "of African origin," or even omitting these remarks. On the other hand, some writers have been too quick to attribute certain words to Africa. The mere discovery that a word is used in Africa and is different from any known modern English word is not always sufficient evidence that the word is African or that it was brought into English by Negroes. One must not forget that for more than a hundred years before the American slave trade began, European explorers and traders, especially the Portuguese and the Dutch, had contact with various parts of the African coast, and that this made pos-

10: Johnson S-4,5 (no date) 1930
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

GULLAH: THE DIALECT OF THE NEGROES

55

sible (1) the borrowing of European words by the Africans and (2) the adoption of African words by the sailors and traders, the former process naturally being the more active of the two.

174°
192

The history of a specific word will illustrate the difficulties involved. On St. Helena Island the word *malafes*,¹¹⁷ meaning whiskey, is known to a few persons. It is supposedly of African origin. In fact, one dictionary¹¹⁸ lists *malafu*, banana wine, and states that the word is African. Now, in medieval times there was a famous wine, *malvesic*, so named from Napoli di Malvasia, a town on the south coast of the Morea in Greece. It was sold in many ports, and its name was known in dozens of languages. In Dutch it was called *malvezy*, and this form came into English as *malvesie*. Chaucer mentioned "A Iubbe of Malveyse" in the *Canterbury Tales*.

The close relation between *f* and *v* made it easy for *malvesie* to become *malfesie*, and this form is very close to the St. Helena *malafes*. The name of the wine, however, was later changed in English from *malvesie* to *malmsey*, so that the old form was perpetuated only in oral language. It is certain that the old name was known to some of the English who colonized America. The word had also probably penetrated various African languages. The form *malafu*, attributed to Africa, has already been cited. In the Swahili (Zanzibar region) *m'lava* for drunk or intoxicated was reported in Browne's *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise*, 1846, p. 578.

¹¹⁷ Noted by Mrs. Parsons in her *Folk-Lore of the Sea Islands*, p. xxi. For a possible West Indian parallel, see her *Folk Tales of Andros Island, Bahamas*, p. 20: *Malantre*.

¹¹⁸ Funk and Wagnall's. No specific African language is mentioned, however, and nothing said as to the extent of the use of the word in America.

10: Johnson S-4,5 (no date) 1930
 NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
 South Carolina
 St. Helena Island

56

FOLK CULTURE ON ST. HELENA ISLAND

• 174
 192

Here, then, is a word known in England in Chaucer's day cropping out in various places centuries later. Its appearance among the Negroes of the Sea Islands has given rise to the supposition that it is of African origin, which was certainly not the case. The question then arises, might it not at least be of African provenience? Perhaps so, since the African forms are different from the English form: *m'la'va*, *mal'afec*, *malafu* (sometimes *mala'fu*) as compared to *mal'vesie*. Still *mal'afec* could be an English dialectal pronunciation of *malvesie* and might have entered this country with the English. At any rate, this word affords an excellent illustration of the need for caution in the study of strange words found in American Negro speech.¹¹⁹

No better evidence of the almost complete assimilation of English language habits by the Negro can be found than the scarcity of English words of African origin. Various words have been thought to be of African extraction, but many of them have turned out to be archaic English¹²⁰ or to be derived from Spanish or Portuguese.¹²¹ There have been, of course, numerous individual survivals, that is, instances in which one person would continue to use a word or two of his native African language, but these have not obtained any diffusion and have about disappeared.

¹¹⁹ The dictionaries and grammars of various African languages have nearly all been compiled since 1800, and there had been plenty of time for the assimilation of European words by African tongues. I sometimes wonder if *bachra*, white man, said to be derived from the Etk of Old Calabar, where it meant a spirit or powerful being, might not have come from English *beaver*, or a related word from English or some other European language.

¹²⁰ E.g., *bravus*, meaning something extra, something in addition, thought by some to be African, is from English *brass* or *brotta*. *Tote*, to carry, is also English. See list of archaisms above.

¹²¹ E.g., *pichaniny* is from Portuguese, *pequeno*.

10: Johnson S-4,5 (no date) 1930
 NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
 South Carolina
 St. Helena Island

GULLAH: THE DIALECT OF THE NEGROES 57

For an African word to gain a regional diffusion in this country, it either had to designate some object which was familiar to a large proportion of the slaves but was new to the English settlers, or it had to be an expressive substitute for the name of some object already known to the white people. Words for certain plants like *okra*, *gumbo*, *yam*, *goober*, are examples of the first type. *Buckra*, for white man, and *cooter*, for terrapin, are examples of the second type.

Several words now generally conceded to be of African origin were introduced to the white people in this country during slavery. The vegetable name, *okra*, is familiar to most people, its synonym, *gumbo*, a little less widely known; *yam* (potato) is in general use; *goober* (peanut) is common throughout the South, but its synonym, *pinda* or *pindar*, is less popular; *cooter* is known to the whites in most of the Southern states. All of these words are in use in the Gullah area today. In addition there are several which are practically confined to this area although occasionally found elsewhere in the lower South. *Buckra* is used in the low country, but the works of Gonzales and others have increased its literary diffusion of late. *Ki* as an exclamation is heard among the Negroes in most parts of the Gullah area. *Oona*¹²² (*thou* or *you*) thought to be African, is common in the Gullah region.¹²³

¹²² Sometimes *yunnah*, *hunnah*, *uwunnah*.

¹²³ Possible sources exist in several West African languages. In the Kusa or Yaw language, *thou* is *yini*. In the Sonray *thou* is *jangar*. See Benton, *Notes on Some Languages of the Western Sudan*, p. 122. *Thou* is *yi*, *ya*, *ye*, *we*, *wo*, *eru*, etc., in several languages of Guinea and the Sudan. In Koi and in Gbaraha the second person plural is *roun*, in Kparabon it is *rouna*, in Bo it is *ou*, in Troughon it is *rouou*. See Meillet and Cohen, *Les Langues du Monde*, section on "Langues de Soudan et de la Guinée." In Browne's *Sketches of a Whaling Cruise*, a vocabulary of Sowheli (or Swahili), the language of Zanzibar, is printed.

10: Johnson S-4,5 (no date) 1930
 NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
 South Carolina
 St. Helena Island

GULLAH: THE DIALECT OF THE NEGROES 59

lish to the Negro or from the Negro to the English is not known at present, but there is evidence that its ultimate derivation will prove to be African.¹²⁹

These words include all which are used throughout or in large sections of the Gullah area which have been shown to be of African derivation. The word *Gullah* itself might be added. In the Savannah section the word *Geechy* is similarly used to designate the Negroes of that region, and it seems likely that it came from the name of a river near Savannah, the Ogeechee.¹³⁰ Negroes in the vicinity of this river were called 'Geechy River Negroes, which was finally shortened to *Geechy*.¹³¹

It is probable that in this country the white man has been the medium of conservation and diffusion of these African words more than the Negro has. Some of the words were adopted by planters in the West Indies and were brought to South Carolina by those who migrated

¹²⁹ Smith states that Professor W. A. Craigie derives it "from African *nyam*—to eat: *n'yam*—food." This is not specific enough. I have examined vocabularies of about thirty West African languages, and only one has any word for eat which resembles *nyam*, viz., the Samra, *yayum*.

¹³⁰ Pronounced *Ogeechee*. Of Indian origin.

¹³¹ Professor Smith lists *geechee* as African, but he refers to a different usage, namely, as an adjective in the sense of "goosey." I have never encountered *geechee* used in this sense. Smith lists several other words as possibly African (*Gullah*, pp. 32-3). These are *cymbi*, *bahalings*, *swanga*, *gaffer*, *geechee*, *penepae*, *da*, *da-da*, *du-du*, and *Stepney*. I have seen no specific African derivations for any of these. None of these is used on St. Helena, as far as our research staff can ascertain, except *swanga*, meaning swaggering, boastful, etc. I think this is too close to our *swank*, *swankw*, *swagger*, etc., to need any other explanation. Words like *think* and *thank* are often pronounced in Gullah with more of a g sound than a k sound. This tendency would change the English dialectic *swanky* to *swangy* or *swanga*. *Swanky* has the same meaning as Gullah *swanga*, namely "swaggering" (adj.) and "a strapping fellow" (noun). See Wright, *Provincial Dictionary*, also *English Dialect Dictionary*. *Da* and *da-da* are possibly dialect pronunciations of *there*, *that* *there*. Smith's list was compiled from various sources, and it was not always possible for him to get definite information as to meanings, pronunciations, etc.

10: Johnson S-4,5 (no date) 1930
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

60

FOLK CULTURE ON ST. HELENA ISLAND

194 from the West Indies. The variety of African language
192 groups and the conditions of slavery were such that it was
difficult for any particular African word to survive over a
large area through its use by slaves alone. But here and
there planters would observe certain native words used
by a few individuals to designate well known objects like
terrapins, peanuts, etc., and they would take up these
words in their conversations with slaves. Then, finding
that other planters had encountered similar words, they
began to use the best known ones in everyday speech and
in writing, thus giving them a sound basis for survival.
Then, too, there is the probability that a few African
words were introduced directly into English by white sail-
ors and traders who had picked them up in the various
slave stations on the African Coast.

Naturally enough, in Englishing certain African
words, the Southern white man has added an *r* to the
spellings so that it will be seen and not heard. He writes
cooter, *goober*, *pindar*, but as a rule he pronounces them
as the Negroes do, their African originals being *kudu*,
gingooba, and *mpinda*.

THE PERSISTENCE OF GULLAH

19 Smith has attributed some of the characteristics and
177 the persistence of Gullah to the native quality of the
178 "Gullah tribesmen." He thinks that "their resolute and
persistent nature evidently assisted in impressing their
dialectal characteristics on weaker and more plastic Ne-
groes from elsewhere brought in contact with them, and
definitely fixed for two hundred years the tonality of the
Negro dialect of the Carolina and Georgia Coast."¹²²

¹²² *Gullah*, p. 8.

10: Johnson S-4,5 (no date) 1930
 NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
 South Carolina
 St. Helena Island

FOLK SONGS ON ST. HELENA ISLAND

107

collectors of spirituals? And why are they not common property of the Negroes in the intermediate sections? The simple explanation, I believe, is this: these songs originated further north than St. Helena, probably in the piedmont of North Carolina and Virginia, during the white revival period. By the usual process of folk transmission they spread out gradually from the area of origin, and, by the time they reached the outlying sections like the Sea Islands and the trans-Appalachian country, they had disappeared and had been replaced by other songs in the area of origin. It would be safe to predict that if collectors will look into the matter they will find in other communities on the fringe of the black belt and among individuals of the older generation in the piedmont a surprising number of these St. Helena spirituals.⁸⁸ Thus the percentage of pentatonic tunes on St. Helena increased after the infiltration of songs from the area which had felt strongly the folk music heritage of the Scotch-Irish. These considerations are all directly opposed to the theory that the scale peculiarities of the spirituals survive from African traits.

Modulations. Change from one key or one mode to another within a tune is practically unknown in the Negro spirituals. Modulations are frequent in conventional church music, but in the plainer music of the white revivals of a hundred years ago as recorded in the songsters, modulations were exceedingly rare. This musical heritage was derived from English folk songs, of which Sharp has said,

⁸⁸ For example, recently a Negro woman from Chapel Hill, N. C., was comparing spirituals with a woman from St. Helena. Upon hearing the St. Helena version of *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, she exclaimed, "That's the way my folks used to sing it all the time." In the up-country the other version of *Roll, Jordan, Roll* has displaced this one, which is usually considered peculiar to the Sea Islands.

533

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174

(114)
(178)

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(184)